

# MUSICAL.: RUSSELL IN ENGLAND.

The New - York Mirror: a Weekly Gazette of Literature and the Fine Arts (1823-1842); Apr 9, 1842; 20, 15;  
American Periodicals  
pg. 118

London Morning Chronicle, the second from the London Morning Post. The Morning Chronicle is the leading Whig paper, and the Morning Post is the journal most in vogue among the *elite*.

"On Wednesday evening a vocal entertainment was given in Mr. Kirkman's rooms in Soho-square, by Mr. Henry Russell, a gentleman who has acquired celebrity as a vocalist, during a long residence in the United States, but who then appeared for the first time before London audience. His entertainment was of the same description with those which were so universally popular in America; consisting, namely, of a number of vocal pieces, chiefly of his own composition, sung and accompanied on the piano-forte by himself. To supply, in this manner, the whole materials of an evening's entertainment was an arduous task, more especially as it was not varied, after the manner of Dibdin, or Bannister, or Mathews, by comic recitations. But Mr. Russell's reliance on his own powers was justified by the result, for he fully engaged the attention of the audience, whose pleasure was manifested by warm and incessant applause.

"Mr. Russell is not only possessed of vocal attainments of a very high order, but is decidedly a man of genius. His voice, taken in the aggregate of its qualities, is one which (strong as the expression may seem) we have never heard excelled. In *compass* it may be called, we think, a *baritone*; but in power, volume, and that peculiar character more easily felt than described, which the French designate by the word *timbre*, it is a *base*. It is a base, too, without the ponderosity generally belonging to voices of that register, being as light and flexible as most tenors, and sweet and mellow as well as loud and powerful. To these physical gifts, Mr. Russell adds those of feeling and intelligence. He sings with intense earnestness and great expression, and, in one most important particular, we have no hesitation in saying that he is unrivalled by any English singer, Braham alone excepted—this is, the clearness, variety and force of his musical declamation. There was no book of the words, which, we soon found, was wholly unnecessary; for, though some of the pieces were narrative and descriptive poems of considerable length, they were delivered as clearly and intelligibly as if they had been simply recited. The gross inattention to this essential requisite, even of our most eminent singers, is (as our musical readers know) a subject of our never-ceasing complaints and remonstrances. We have often told them to take a lesson from Braham; and we assure them (however little they may relish it) that they have an immense deal to learn from Mr. Russell. It is evident that the management of his voice and utterance has been acquired in the Italian school of singing; and his own good sense has shown him, that, while distinct articulation of language does not necessarily detract from the beauty of vocal sound, indistinct utterance deprives vocal sound of its greatest charm, its power of heightening and enforcing the expression of sentiment and passion.

"Mr. Russell's pieces, with one slight exception, were of his own composition. Some of them were songs, or ballads; others, what he called *scenas* (*cantatas* would have been a more correct title) of considerable magnitude. One of these, 'The Maniac,' is founded on the incident of a gentleman confined, though sane, in a mad-house, losing his reason through despair, and dying frantic. The prisoner in his cell, mingles piteous entreaties for freedom, with wild ravings and incoherent visions of former days of love and happiness. All this is depicted by the music with much genius; and one passage in particular, 'I see her dancing in the hall,' which is ingeniously accompanied by an airy dancing measure, is exquisitely pathetic and beautiful. Another of these extended compositions, 'The Ship on Fire,' is still more powerful, both in regard to descriptive effects, and the expression of passion in its utmost intensity. What we liked least was, 'The Ivy Green,' from Dickens' *Pickwick*. Mr. Russell has produced, to these words, a melody which is somewhat common and merely pretty; the gloomy wildness of the poetry having wholly escaped him. This song, in its music, ought to be akin to Caspar's drinking song in the *Freischütz*, or to the celebrated 'King Death is a rare old fellow,' of the Chevalier Neukomm. It has been attempted by various composers, but never yet with success.

"On the whole, this entertainment was not only of a novel, but a very interesting kind, and will, we doubt not, become permanently attractive. We think that Mr. Russell might, with advantage, mingle with his own pieces some of the best compositions by the greatest masters; thus producing a variety which cannot be imparted by the works of one author, however good they may be in themselves.

## MUSICAL.

### RUSSELL IN ENGLAND.

HENRY RUSSELL, the noble vocalist, has made an immense impression in London. The Times, Morning Herald, Chronicle, Post, Court Journal, Literary Gazette, Dispatch, Naval and Military Gazette, Sunday Times, Bell's Weekly Messenger, Atlas, Evening Globe, Buck's Gazette, Telegraph, Leamington Gazette, and a number of other journals, speak of his merits in terms of the highest commendation. This is precisely what we expected. The truth is, Russell is a superior genius, and all attempts to decry his talents are of no avail. He is a universal favorite throughout America, and his friends and admirers here will rejoice at his success in the mother country. We make room for the following extracts with pleasure. The first is from the

During the evening we were greatly impressed with the peculiarly dramatic character of his performance; and we are convinced, that were he to appear at one of the principal theatres, he would be an invaluable acquisition to the English musical stage."—*London Morning Chronicle*.

"The novel experiment—novel, at least, in England, though not in America—of giving a concert but with one singer, was yesterday evening tried by Mr. H. Russell, at Mr. Kirkman's commodious rooms in Soho-square, which were fully filled with a respectable and most inquisitive audience. Mr. Russell himself was the singer, and his performances were restricted to his own compositions. We remember having seen this gentleman some twelve or thirteen years back, at the Surrey Theatre, on the boards of which he was associated with Miss Fanny Woodham; Miss Coveney, and other juvenile musicians, in the representation of English operas, especially in that of *Artaseres*. These boy-and-girl performances were very successful at the time, as much on account of their musical merit as of their novelty, and amongst the *corps operatique*, young Russell was particularly distinguished for precocious talent. It seldom happens that a very early development of genius in an imitative art is followed by maturity of perfection in after life. Mozart, it is true, was a brilliant exception, but in the majority of cases the blossom perishes before the fruit is formed. Such, however, has not been the case with Mr. Russell. The promises put forth by the boy have been realized by the man, and both he and his friends may congratulate themselves upon their fulfilment in the instance of yesterday evening's concert. The voice of Mr. Russell is a base of much power, richly and roundly toned, and of considerable compass. Moreover, it is capable of great energy of expression, and is altogether free from that monotonous tameness which too frequently spoils the best efforts of many of our native singers. The songs he sang were all, as we have already stated, of his own composition; but what was wanting in variety of musical authorship, was amply counterbalanced by a healthful raciness, as rare as it was satisfactory and unexpected. Some portion of this pleasing freshness is undoubtedly due to the poets whose lyrics Mr. Russell has translated into the language of sweet sounds, among whom Mr. Charles Mackay pre-eminently ranks.

"Instead of the namby-pambyism, bathos, and sickly sentimentality ordinarily met with in modern English ballads, we found in the songs by this gentleman (and by the others too) wholesomeness of subject allied to vigor of expression, the only solid foundation for a lasting musical structure. As a proof of this our opinion we may quote G. P. Morris's 'Woodman, spare that tree,' a song, the extraordinary sale of which in both England and America is only to be accounted for by the happy combination of sense with sound abounding throughout the composition. In addition, we may name Mr. Mackay's scene, 'Wind of the winter's night, whence comest thou?'—a most pleasing specimen of unity of purpose in poet and musician; and another, 'The ship on fire,' also by Mr. Mackay, which, in the language of the author, 'is intended to depict the feelings of passengers who had to contend with the terrors of a tempest that burst over the ship in all its force and fury, at the moment they were returning to their native land, buoyant with hope and excited by the anticipated delight at being welcomed by friends from whom they had long been separated. After the ceasing of the storm the ship is discovered to be in flames, and the cry of 'Fire!' awakens the most agonizing fears in every bosom. They are lost to hope; but at length, in the very midst of their despair, a sail appears in sight, and they are saved.' Materials such as these are of the right sort for the musician; he has something to work upon, something whereon imagination and thought may exercise their creative faculties, and Mr. Russell has well availed himself of his opportunities. All his songs are pleasing, and many of them are sterling evidences of superior talent. His singing was graphic, artist-like, and prominently invested with that character of intellectuality, without which music is but a soulless body. He was enthusiastically received, and frequently encored by all present. We may add that his style of piano-forte accompaniment is of a most finished kind, and that the instrument used for the occasion was one of the finest, both in tone and power, we ever heard."—*London Morning Post*.

Mr. Russell sang on the 10th of March at the Hanover-square Rooms, and was announced in the following words: "Miss Nunn has great pleasure in announcing that the distinguished master of English song, Mr. H. Russell, will appear."